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TAGS: PGOV ASEC MARR IS LE JO

SUBJECT: TFLE01: PROTESTERS DENOUNCE ISRAEL, U.S. AND GOJ;
MEDIA FOCUS ON U.S. WEAPONS SUPPLIES TO ISRAEL

REF: AMMAN 5486

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Friday after-prayer protests remained peaceful but were larger and more widespread than the previous week's. The New York Times' report that the USG was accelerating supplies of bombs to Israel dominated local media, along with allegations that U.S. diplomatic efforts were aimed at delaying a ceasefire. Senior GOJ advisors said Nasrallah's recent TV interview won him considerable support on the street. End summary.

Protests Peaceful, Larger

¶2. (SBU) A peaceful rally against Israeli operations in Lebanon marched July 22 through downtown Amman. The Public Security Directorate (PSD) estimated the crowd at 2500-3000. Protestors also demonstrated peacefully in Irbid, Al Ramtha, Ajloun, and Jerash after Friday prayers.

¶3. (U) The GOJ had issued a permit for the rally in downtown Amman. PSD broke up another, unauthorized protest, which the professional associations attempted to mount at the same time at another downtown location. No arrests were reported.

¶4. (U) Embassy Amman and Embassy staff housing are several miles from downtown.

¶5. (SBU) In contrast to protests one week ago, the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front, joined the authorized protest. Local and regional media gave prominent coverage to the leaders of the Brotherhood and the Front as they marched arm-in-arm with Muslim and Christian clerics, and members of parliament, under flags that included the yellow Hizballah banner. In addition to condemning Israel and the U.S., Brotherhood leader Saleh al-Falahat and Front SecGen Zaki Bani Irsheid both publicly challenged the GOJ to distance itself from the U.S. and Israel and to support Lebanon, and to release three imprisoned Front members of parliament.

Media Blast U.S.

¶6. (SBU) Local headlines focused July 23 on the New York Times report that the U.S. was accelerating the supply to Israel of "smart bombs." This news overshadowed most other developments, including news of the Secretary's plans to travel to the region. The liberal "al-Ghad", Jordan's most widely-circulated independent daily, headlined "American Smart Bombs Accompany Rice to the Region." The elite, liberal English language Jordan Times, editorial was typical, calling Washington "bloodthirsty" for giving Tel Aviv the "green light" for continued military operations.

¶7. (C) The King's senior aides here told the Ambassador that Nasrallah's weekend TV interview was hugely successful from Hizballah's point of view, and cemented popular support in Jordan for him as a heroic "David" fighting the Israeli "Goliath."

Hale